

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
TRSE-00 OMB-01 /065 W
-----017325 300152Z /75

R 281410Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8957
INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

S E C R E T BEIRUT 4291

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, MASS, LE, US
SUBJ: SYRIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS LEBANESE ARMY

1. FROM PERSPECTIVE OF BEIRUT WE BELIEVE SYRIANS ARE VERY DISSATISFIED WITH COMPOSITION AND STRUCTURE OF THE LEBANESE ARMY. THIS ATTITUDE HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY APPARENT SINCE THE FAYYADIYAH INCIDENTS IN FEBRUARY, WHICH BEGAN WITH EXCHANGES OF FIRE BETWEEN LEBANESE AND SYRIAN SOLDIERS AND EVOLVED INTO A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE SYRIANS AND CHRISTIAN MILITIAS. SINCE THEN, THE SYRIANS HAVE TENDED TO VIEW THE LEBANESE ARMY AS AN EXTENSION OF THE LEBANESE FRONT. ASSEM QANSUH, HEAD OF THE BATH PARTY IN LEBANON, HAS FOR EXAMPLE, REPEATED TO EMBOFF OVER LAST SEVERAL MONTHS THAT ARMY IS UNDER MARONITE DOMINATION AND AS SUCH IS UNACCEPTABLE TO THE SYRIANS.

2. WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT THE SYRIANS AS A RESULT HAVE BEEN INTIMIDATING MUSLIMS FROM JOINING OR SUPPORTING THE ARMY. THERE ARE OTHER INDICATIONS, HOWEVER, OF SYRIAN DISSATISFACTION. G-2 JOHNNY ABDU AND GENERAL KHOURY HAVE BOTH COMPLAINED TO DATT IN GENERAL TERMS ABOUT THE SYRIAN ATTITUDE. KHOURY HAS REMARKED TO DATT THAT AFTER FAYYADIYAH THERE WAS A SERIOUS DETERIORATION IN RELATIONS
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BETWEEN SYRIAN AND LEBANESE ARMY OFFICERS. KHOURY HAS ALSO NOTED THAT THE SYRIANS HAVE:

A. BEEN HESITANT TO ALLOW THE LEBANESE ARMY TO TAKE OVER ANY SECURITY FUNCTIONS FROM THE ADF IN SIDON AND TRIPOLI OR TO TURN OVER CHECKPOINTS TO THE LEBANESE ARMY IN BEIRUT, EVEN IN THE WAKE OF RECENT FIGHTING.

B. LOOTED AND STRIPPED BARRACKS SUCH AS HENRI SHIHAB IN BEIRUT, OF ALL EQUIPMENT, INCLUDING DESKS AND LIGHT FIXTURES, BEFORE TURNING THEM OVER TO THE LEBANESE.

C. REFUSED TO TURN OVER OTHER BARRACKS AND MAINTENANCE FACILITIES IN BEIRUT AND SIDON TO THE LEBANESE ARMY.

D. NOT RETURNED EQUIPMENT TO THE LEBANESE ARMY CAPTURED DURING 1975-76 CIVIL WAR, SUCH AS M-113 ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS, MACHINE GUNS AND RADIOS

E. FAILED TO PROVIDE EQUIPMENT WHICH THE LEBANESE ARMY REQUESTED.

3. SYRIA'S RELATIONS WITH GENERAL KHOURY ARE NOT GOOD, AND WITH G-2 ABDU EVEN WORSE. ASSEM QANSUH HAS SAID THAT KHOURY'S CREDENTIALS ARE TAINTED BECAUSE OF HIS PAST CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE PHALANGE. DATT SOURCES HAVE REPORTED THAT THE SYRIANS MISTRUST ABDU BECAUSE OF HIS CLOSE TIES WITH CHRISTIAN MILITIAS.

4. WE BELIEVE THAT SYRIAN EXPRESSIONS OF DISSATISFACTION WITH THE LEBANESE ARMY ARE IN PART SINCERE AND IN PART DISINGENOUS. THE SYRIANS BELIEVE (CORRECTLY) THAT THE
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DOMINATE THE ARMY. AT THE SAME TIME, SYRIANS WOULD DOUBTLESSLY LIKE TO BUILD AN ARMY SYMPATHETIC TO SYRIAN INTERESTS IN LEBANON AND CAPABLE TO SOME EXTENT OF CONFRONTING THE ISRAELIS.

5. WE DO NOT THINK, HOWEVER, THAT THE SYRIANS POSE THE PRINCIPAL OBSTACLES TO REBUILDING THE LEBANESE ARMY. THE LEBANESE THEMSELVES POSE THE PRINCIPAL OBSTACLES. THEY HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO ACHIEVE A NATIONAL CONSENSUS OR TO MAKE THE DIFFICULT DECISIONS WHICH WOULD ENGENDER WIDER NATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE ARMY, SUCH AS INCREASING THE NUMBER OF MUSLIMS IN SENIOR POSITIONS, DISMISSING EXTREMIST AND INCOMPETENT OFFICERS FROM THE ARMY AND DRAFTING A NEW ARMY LAW. THE FAULT, ALAS, LIES MOSTLY IN BEIRUT, NOT DAMASCUS.
PARKER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY PERSONNEL, ARMED FORCES, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BEIRUT04291
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780312-0544
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978076/aaaaafbx.tel
Line Count: 110
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 81089e73-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2007362
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SYRIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS LEBANESE ARMY
TAGS: MILI, MASS, LE, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/81089e73-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014